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# VISUAL INSTRUCTION IN NEW YORK STATE

BY ALFRED W. ABRAMS,

Chief of Division of Visual Instruction, State Department of Education,  
New York.

Approximately 300,000 lantern slides were lent to schools, libraries and organizations of New York state by the division of visual instruction of the state education department during the school year ending June 30, 1916. It is a conservative estimate to say that on the average at least a hundred persons gave more or less intensive study to each of these slides. This is the equivalent of one person studying 30,000,000 different pictures. The pictures lent in the form of slides are also furnished as mounted photographic prints which are widely circulated. Besides, art instruction is encouraged by the lending of large framed reproductions of standard works of art for wall decoration, and schools are encouraged by state aid to buy such pictures.

New York is the pioneer state in the field of organized visual instruction, having begun nearly thirty years ago the preparation of pictorial aids to instruction for its normal schools and larger communities. Since that time more than half a million dollars of state money has been expended in the preparation and circulation of pictures.

## THE SELECTION OF PICTURES

In 1911 the fire in the state capitol destroyed the entire collection of negatives, slides, prints and equipment that had been accumulated up to that time. The loss was a heavy one, but it offered the opportunity in the reestablishment of the collection to put into effect such ideas of visual instruction and such plans of administration as previous experience had shown to be desirable. Many of the earlier practices in collecting and organizing material were abandoned and higher standards established. The pictures of the new collection are superior to the earlier ones in quality, are selected more closely with reference to subject value, and represent a much wider range of subjects. Travel views are relatively less numerous and more attention is being given to art, literature,

history and the sciences. The relatively rapid increase in loans during the last few years is a convincing evidence that a more scientific and pedagogical attitude toward pictures as a medium of expression is being encouraged.

The following are some of the ideas and practices underlying the selection, organization and distribution of pictures at the present time. While entertainment is a proper purpose in the use of pictures, a state collection should be made primarily with a view to serious study and instruction. A collection increases in value as pictures of relatively little importance, of temporary interest and of inferior quality are kept out. Selection, of course, means elimination and in the case of pictures elimination needs to be rather drastic. Pictures are accepted for their authenticity, their truthfulness and their expressiveness. These essential qualities go far toward making pictures attractive, which is another necessary feature.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF PICTURES

A scientific basis of classification similar to that used in libraries has been adopted rather than an arrangement by fixed "sets," in which slides are numbered consecutively. Provision is thus made for accessions and for the selection of pictures by many classes of borrowers in the widest possible range of combinations. All pictures of the collection are made from original negatives owned by the division. Half-tones are never reproduced. Many special drawings and maps are prepared. A full title is given each picture to indicate not only what is shown in the picture, but also the source, place and time of the negative. Study notes and bibliographies are furnished, but no "lectures" accompany the pictures.

The work of the bureau is conducted on the theory that the basis of all true visual instruction is real observation. Impressions must go farther than the physical eye; the mind must analyze a picture before there can be real visualization. Unless there is some mental reaction to the pictures presented, no educational results are acquired. As the reaction becomes more vigorous and better directed, the visualization becomes more perfect. Pictures should be used not merely to entertain and impart interesting information, but even more to train the mind to make accurate observations, intelligent discriminations and correct judgments. In short, visual

instruction is an old inductive process and involves a strict adherence to well-recognized principles of inductive study.

#### A FORM OF EDUCATIONAL EXTENSION

But while the collection is being made and organized primarily with a view to serious class instruction in the schools, it is for that reason none the less adapted for educational extension work. A very large proportion of the loans are made for use by all sorts of local organizations—study clubs, civic societies, churches, etc. Slides used by the schools for class instruction are also presented to parents and others by teachers and pupils in evening exercises. Public libraries not only keep catalogues of the state collection on hand and borrow slides and photographs for the use of local organizations, but also themselves use freely the mounted prints on bulletin boards and reference tables.

The general aim is to make the collection a great storehouse of excellent pictures of things that are of large and permanent interest, to organize the pictures scientifically, and to make them readily available for the use of anyone within the state for strictly free instruction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Abrams, A. W. "Visual Instruction and Its Management," *American School Board Journal*, July, 1914.